

Guidelines Regarding Academic Activities in Case of a Pandemic

1. Rationale

The current guidelines are meant to help maintain the University of Ottawa's educational mission during a potential influenza outbreak. They include the guiding principles and procedures designed to ensure the continuity of learning and the application of remedial measures in order to minimize the impact of disruptions on students' course of study in case of a pandemic. These guidelines are also part of the University of Ottawa's Pandemic Plan (<http://www.uottawa.ca/flu/pandemicplan.html>)

2. Guiding Principles

These guidelines are based on the following principles:

2.1 Protecting members of the University community

Maintaining the safety of all members of the University community is essential. Therefore, all academic decisions must take into account that the institution has the responsibility to offer a safe work and learning environment for students who study both here and abroad.

All decisions pertaining to academic affairs will be made in consultation with the Office of Risk Management, who is in constant communication with local, regional and national public health agencies.

2.2 Maintaining the integrity of courses and programs

The integrity of courses and programs must be maintained. Therefore, the academic requirements established by programs must be maintained despite disruption or interruption of activities at the University. To this end, the training and support offered to students must be maintained as much as possible.

2.3 Treating students fairly

The University will carefully consider situations when students do not attend classes or participate in other academic activities while activities at the University are disrupted or interrupted, either because they are sick or because they are caring for someone who is sick. It will implement various measures to promote the continuity of academic activities as much as possible. For instance, it may facilitate students' access to teaching materials presented in their absence by revising deadlines if needed and implementing any other measures deemed necessary, while respecting the principle on the integrity of programs.

2.4 Communicating effectively with the entire community

Students, professors and staff members must be informed on a regular basis of how the situation is evolving and how it is affecting academic and day-to-day activities at the University. The communication strategy must take into account the location of community members, their geographic distribution across the University's campuses as well as how each of these two factors is affected by the event causing disruption or interruption of activities.

3. **Procedures**

3.1 Disseminating the information

Any information pertaining to the pandemic and how it affects academic activities at the University will be disseminated by the Communications Office through the usual communication channels such as the University's web site, e-mail, etc.

3.1.1 As soon as disruption or interruption of activities at the University is imminent, the Vice-President Academic and Provost will ask the Communications Office to prepare to inform the University community in a timely manner. A notice will be sent to the entire university community using the usual communication channels, reminding everyone of the roles and responsibilities of executives, professors, students and staff and indicating the possibility of changes in the institution's usual functioning.

3.1.2 Once activities are disrupted or interrupted, the Vice-President Academic and Provost will make an official announcement and request that:

3.1.2.1 The Office of the Registrar take the necessary steps to inform academic units and the University community of any changes in course or exam schedules.

3.1.2.2 The Office of the Registrar and academic unit managers make efforts to extend deadlines imposed by external organizations so that students are not penalized (for instance when the University is asked to provide a transcript of a reference letter).

3.1.2.3 The Chief Librarian inform the University community regularly on how the interruption affects access to library collections and library services.

3.1.2.4 The University set up a telephone service that can answer the community's questions on academic activities.

If activities are disrupted or interrupted within only one unit, the faculty, department or service affected will prepare to inform its students.

3.2 Measures for continuing or interrupting academic activities

3.2.1 The Office of the Registrar and the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost will coordinate the implementation of a system to record student absenteeism in order to facilitate the decision-making process as to whether academic activities should continue or be interrupted and to ensure that the best possible action plan is implemented. The Human Resources Service will coordinate the implementation of a similar system to record absenteeism for professors and staff members.

3.2.2 After discussions with their respective deans, department chairs will develop action plans to ensure that academic activities continue despite the temporary absence of professors who deliver courses or other academic activities or that of staff involved in the preparation of these courses or activities. These plans may include reallocation of resources.

Decisions may vary from one faculty to another or even from one program to another depending on the measures required to protect people's health (restricting gatherings, maintaining a certain distance between people, cleaning equipment, etc.)

Because an influenza pandemic is an exceptional, pervasive and unpredictable situation, certain academic regulations may have to be applied more leniently or suspended while some new regulations may have to be created to avoid any permanent penalties for students. To this end, close communication must be maintained with faculties.

3.2.3 The Vice-President Academic and Provost will report to the Executive Committee of the Senate who will decide the criteria that determine when courses and exams should be disrupted or interrupted. These criteria may include the professors' choice to interrupt a course, students' absenteeism due to caring for sick relatives, students' academic achievement, accommodation measures, etc.

3.3 Accommodation and remedial measures

3.3.1 In general, when the interruption affects less than 15% of the University's activities, no special remedial measures are necessary. The session is then shortened and activities go back to normal once the situation resolves.

3.3.2 In general, when the interruption affects more than 15% of the University's activities, faculties are responsible for applying the academic regulations as usual, evaluating the impact of the interruption on courses, seminars, supervision of graduate students, laboratory activities, placements, etc., and identifying the actions that need to be taken to address the situation, keeping in mind principle 2 mentioned above.

3.3.3 The Vice-President Academic and Provost will consult with members of his office and with deans on a regular basis and request a report on the measures taken in each faculty. He will then inform the President and the members of the Executive Committee of the Senate of any developments. He has the authority to extend a session and to allow changes to the schedules of courses and exams that have been disrupted or interrupted, in order to maintain the integrity of courses and programs.

3.3.4 In an extreme situation when the interruption continues to the point that no solution is possible while respecting principle 2 mentioned above, the Vice-President Academic and Provost may recommend to the Executive Committee of the Senate that no credit be granted for the course(s).

3.4 Advisory committee

An advisory committee chaired by the Associate Vice-President Academic and comprising of the Registrar, the Associate Registrar, Vice-deans academic, academic administrators and students will be set up as soon as it is necessary so that it may support the Vice-President Academic and Provost and the deans in the decision-making process.

3.5 Appeal process

The Senate Appeals Committee is responsible for processing the appeals submitted by students following the disruption or interruption of activities at the University.